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ART. II. — *British Poetry at the Close of the Last Century. The Works of Robert Burns; with his Life.* By ALLAN CUNNINGHAM. In four volumes, 12mo. Boston. Hilliard, Gray & Co. 1834.

It is our purpose, in the course of this article, to offer some cursory remarks upon the subject of the poetry of Great Britain during the latter part of the last century. This period is certainly not the most brilliant one in the history of British literature; but it has not been often made the subject of connected comment. Though its claims to attention may not be of the very highest order, it will be found to present some scenes and figures for the canvas, which are rendered the more striking, by their contrast with the mass around them; as the noble remains of Egyptian architecture impress the mind of the traveller the more deeply, because they rise amidst the sands and wastes of the desert.

In accomplishing what we have undertaken, it seems proper to dwell at some length on a few of those instances of literary imposition, which form a marked characteristic of the period. One of the most remarkable perpetrators of this species of fraud was Thomas Chatterton, a rare example of admirable genius, whose early miracles would fill us equally with wonder and despair, were not his fame severely balanced by his melancholy fate. The history of this singular individual may be very briefly told. His father, a poor schoolmaster in Bristol, died a few months before his birth, leaving his family in circumstances of great indigence. During his earliest years, he gave no indications of talent, or interest in any of his studies, but was even dismissed from school as a person of incurable dulness. At the age of fourteen, he was bound as an apprentice to a scrivener, and entered with sufficient assiduity upon the duties of his new vocation, but devoted the hours of his leisure to the study of antiquities. In the year 1768, when he was about sixteen, some public ceremonies were performed on the occasion of opening a new bridge in Bristol. There appeared at the same time in a public journal of that city, a description of the pageant which had accompanied the opening of the old bridge, several centuries before. The narrative purported to be ancient, and exhibited so much minuteness of detail and apparent authenticity, as greatly to

perplex the wise men of that venerable town. It was ascertained on inquiry, that Chatterton was the person, who had offered the manuscript for publication ; and, with equal good sense and liberality, threats were resorted to, in order to induce him to acknowledge whence it was obtained. He bade defiance to these menaces, but was at length induced by persuasion to declare, that this, together with various other old manuscripts, was found by his father in a church in Bristol, of which one of his relatives had been the sexton. It was true, that certain title-deeds and other papers had been anciently deposited in this church ; the chests in which they were contained had been broken open, by authority, some years before, when those which were considered valuable were removed, and the others suffered to remain ; there they were found by Chatterton's father, who conveyed them home, and applied them to the purpose of covering his books. Thus they came into the possession of Chatterton himself ; he wrote upon them poems and other productions, in close imitation of the ancient language and chirography, which he gave to the public as the writings of Mr. Canynge, once an eminent merchant of Bristol and the founder of the church, and of his friend Thomas Rowley, a priest.

It is curious to observe to what extent this remarkable deception was carried by one, who was yet far from having reached the age of manhood. He gave specimens of his manuscripts freely to those who asked for them, and offered to supply Horace Walpole with an account of the ancient painters of Bristol, a class of worthies in regard to whom history, for excellent reasons, had been profoundly silent ; sending him at the same time some portions of the Rowley poems. These were submitted by Walpole to his friend Gray, who at once declared them to be forgeries. It is much to be regretted, that both were too indignant at the attempted imposition to perceive, that the fact of the forgery of such productions was a conclusive proof of the surpassing talent of their author. Walpole repelled his advances with cold reserve, and neither appears subsequently to have taken any interest in his fortunes. But the poems themselves had, meantime, given occasion to a very earnest controversy. Their authenticity was warmly vindicated by Milles and Bryant, and denied with equal zeal by Walpole, Malone, Tyrwhitt and Warton, though the sentiments expressed by the two last in their respective

publications were directly opposite to those which they had previously entertained. Dr. Gregory, in his biography of Chatterton, sums up the testimony on both sides of the question with laudable impartiality, but does not intimate his own opinion ; nor was this necessary ; his statement of the case is quite sufficient to convince the reader, if he were not convinced before, that Canynge and Rowley were both quite guiltless of any poetical handiwork, which had been locked up for centuries in company with title-deeds, under the reverend care of successive generations of church-wardens. But there is no longer any controversy on the subject. These poems are now universally admitted to be the productions of Chatterton himself ; and, considering the circumstances under which they were written, and the age of their author, they are indeed miracles of early genius.

In all the records of sorrow, we know not a more melancholy tale, than that of the close of Chatterton's career. He went to London ; there he engaged in various literary enterprises, and labored, but without success, to gain distinction as a political writer. His plans one after another failed ; at length, before he had reached the age of eighteen, crushed by disappointment and despair, and, as there is too much reason to believe, tortured by actual hunger, he put an end to his own life by poison. Perhaps this sad result may partly have been owing to the pride, which shrunk from revealing the secret of his necessities ; to the perverted sentiment, which taught him to regard self-destruction as the just and unobjectionable remedy for his misfortunes ; and, more than all, to his perseverance in an imposition, that transferred to others the credit for ability, which was certainly his due. The world could hardly be expected to relieve distresses which it did not know ; but it touches the heart, to see so brilliant a light thus immaturely quenched ; to see powers, that might have left behind them a long train of permanent glory, perishing at the very dawn, for want of a little generous encouragement and aid ; to see the boy, who might have filled one of the highest seats in England's literary temple, soliciting in vain a wretched post on board a vessel bound to Africa, and finally dying, dying of hunger, in the very heart of the metropolis, unpitied and alone.

There is a surprising disparity in point of excellence between the poems of Chatterton, which are written in imitation of the

old English style, and those which he admitted to be his own. The merit of all the forgeries is by no means equal, but they are very far superior to the other; very many of these are collected and published in the editions of his writings, which have no merit whatever. There are satires, distinguished by nothing but their venom; love songs, colder than the polar ice; and burlettas, of which the absurdity disputes the palm with the grossness. Occasionally the satire comes home directly to the mark; the amatory verses kindle into warmth and beauty; the foul ravings of political vindictiveness and impiety are exchanged for tones that seem to issue from an angel's lyre; but certain it is that, but for the forgeries, the fame of Chatterton would not outshine the many stars, that twinkle dimly through the mists of mediocrity. The superiority of the imitations is probably to be ascribed to the fact, that they were his favorites, and called forth all his power; from their very nature, they must have been prepared with great care and circumspection; while the others were either not published by himself, or were thrust into magazines under a fictitious name. To many of them, he would certainly have been reluctant to advance a public claim. Yet it should not be forgotten, that his writings were collected and preserved, not by himself, but by others, and thus the misfortune which pursued him through life has also clung to his memory. But after making these deductions, there remains in both classes so much evidence of mature ability and knowledge of the world, that the reader perpetually forgets that they are the writings of a boy, and is tempted to apply to them too harsh a rule of criticism. As a whole, they irresistibly impress us with the idea, that England has produced few poets, superior or even equal in genius to this child of sorrow. We would not become the apologists of any species of deception; but may it not be said in extenuation of that of Chatterton, that it was committed at an age when such things are apt to be regarded rather in the light of sport than knavery; that it was designed to injure no one's fame, and in fact injured no other person than himself; and that, however criminal, it was dearly expiated by the misery of his last hours?

Perhaps the most remarkable attempt at imposition on record, certainly the most remarkable as respects the interest which it excited, was displayed in the publication of certain poems, purporting to be translations from Ossian, a Gaelic bard

of the third century. James Macpherson, who modestly contented himself with the name of a translator, was a native of the Scottish Highlands. In an interview with Home, the author of the tragedy of Douglas, he produced some specimens of Gaelic poetry, stating at the same time, that much more of it might be obtained from aged persons in the mountains. Home, together with Dr. Blair and others, who were greatly delighted with the specimens, prevailed upon Macpherson to publish those in his possession, which he accordingly did, in 1760, in a small volume. The work was received with general acclamation in Scotland, and with mingled wonder and delight by the larger class of readers in England. Such men as Robertson, Ferguson, Lord Elbank and Gray were of the number of its enthusiastic admirers; but there were not wanting unbelievers in either country, by whom it was denounced as a bold and worthless fabrication. Macpherson had, in the meantime, been despatched into the Highlands for a fresh supply of the precious fragments, and came back heavily laden with epics, which he shortly after published.

The old mine of poetry, which had been thus suddenly sprung, produced a commotion in the learned world like that which follows the explosion of a bomb-shell. Macpherson, who soon after came to this country as secretary of the Governor of Florida, steadfastly refused to satisfy the sceptical, pretending to consider it quite intolerable that his word should be doubted; and when David Hume benevolently intimated to him that the world would like some more solid security, bore himself so loftily, that the philosopher in a heat expressed a hope, that he would take advantage of his travels to improve his manners, by imitating those of the Chickasaws and Choc-taws. The host of unbelievers was led on by no less a personage, than Dr. Johnson. This eminent individual took fire at the idea of a new Parnassus in the Scottish Highlands, and began, as was remarked by Cowper on another occasion, to trample with his great foot upon every feather of Ossian's muse. In reply to an irritating letter of Macpherson, he threatened to make him feel the weight of something more substantial than a logical deduction. Aided by a host of others, he dealt his blows about him like one of the sturdiest of the Celtic heroes. The vindicators of Macpherson, on the other hand, were numerous and able, and the most prominent among them was Dr. Blair. Ossian himself might

have likened the encounter of the combatants to the dark storms of autumn, pouring from two echoing hills. It happened, as is usual in such cases, that the eyes of the martialists were completely blinded by the smoke of their own artillery ; the contest outlasted three or four sieges of Troy, and it was not until the opening of the present century, that it began to subside into something like repose.

The question of the authenticity of these poems is completely set at rest. The Highland Society of Scotland appointed a commission to recover, if they could, the original text of Ossian. Their report, drawn up by the excellent author of the *Man of Feeling*, while it betrays an inclination on the part of those who framed it, to believe as much as the case will admit, does by no means sustain the pretensions of Macpherson. The truth appears to be, that certain fragments of poetry, of what antiquity does not precisely appear, but in which the names of Fingal and Ossian held a prominent place, had been handed down by tradition in the Highlands, and that these were the basis, on which the gorgeous fabric of Macpherson was reared ; but that the form and coloring, and some portion of the substance, were the work of his own hands. Some of these fragments are certainly beautiful ; but there are others, which might make the lover of Ossian close the book in despair. In one of them, Gaul, the son of Morni, is represented as knocking on the head one of the most illustrious of the bards, for defrauding him of a beef-steak, dressed with onion sauce. Another specimen may be found in the *Antiquary*, where Hector M'Intyre, in, order to convince Mr. Oldbuck that the poetry of Ossian was well remembered in the Highlands, recites a portion of a fragment, describing a conversation between the Celtic bard and the tutelar saint of Ireland. Ossian, piqued at the indifference of St. Patrick towards his poetry, assures him that he looks upon him as little better than a certain animal, not much renowned for wisdom ; the saint remarks with great composure, that the clamor of Ossian's old women's tales, (meaning his minstrelsy,) disturbs his devotional exercises. It is probable, however, that this is nothing more than a liberal paraphrase of the fragment, called the *Prayer of Ossian*, which is rude and barbarous enough, but not particularly ludicrous. The whole passage, however, shews plainly the opinion of Scott, no mean authority, on the subject of Macpherson and his claims.

It is not surprising, that the interest excited by these poems, at the time of their publication, was very general and intense. They came forth, like a voice from the depths of ages, uttering the lofty inspirations of chivalry, breathing the softest notes of love, and pealing like a trumpet-call above the roar of battle ; the standard of Fingal streamed again to the winds, "like a burst of the sun when the tempest was nigh ;" the soul was saddened and elevated by their simple and melancholy images, as when one wanders in the dark paths of the forest, or gazes on the yellow line of the desert, or walks by the solitary shore of the sea. But, when doubts were spread abroad of the authenticity of the poems, all these impressions vanished, like the wreaths of morning mist ; the sound was full of sublimity so long as it was mistaken for the distant thunder, but became almost ludicrous, when it was believed to proceed from the rattling of the wagon on the pavement. The influence of these poems on the English reader, which was very powerful for a time, was then entirely lost ; but on the continent, where their genuineness was less questioned, they continued to exert a surprising power over the prevailing taste in literature. No more acceptable homage could be offered to Napoleon Bonaparte, than to compare him with the Celtic heroes ; in France, the names of Ossian's warriors and heroines bade fair for a season to supplant the good old Christian names ; Goethe was a lover of Ossian, and represents his Werther, on the eve of suicide, as enraptured with his lofty melancholy ; Cesarotti translated him into Italian, and regarded him as standing at the head of all the epic bards ; and Madame de Stael divides literature into two classes, those of the east and north, placing Homer at the head of one, and representing Ossian as the father of the other.

The recent death of William Henry Ireland has drawn the attention of the public anew to the subject of his forgeries of pretended writings of Shakspeare, which imposed upon many for a time, but were at last exploded by his own confession. Ireland, however, wanted the ability of Chatterton, and even of Macpherson. Indeed, his attempt to palm off a drama of his own as Shakspeare's was no sign of remarkable discretion ; he might as well have undertaken to manage the chariot of the sun. We do not enter into a detail of the circumstances of his imposition, because they have been generally circulated in an interesting form in other journals, and because they have little



importance as connected with the literature of the day. The last forty years of the life of Ireland were spent in obscurity, and, we believe, of poverty. His offence was severely visited upon him; the talent, which he certainly possessed, was not afterwards acknowledged; but, if his punishment was hard, the moral it conveys is not without its value, that honesty is quite as good policy in literary matters, as in all other concerns of life.

We have dwelt at some length upon the poems attributed to Ossian, because they are to be considered as in a great degree responsible for the false taste, which constituted quite a leading characteristic of the time, immediately succeeding that of their publication. The attraction of the better part of them probably arose from its resemblance to the simple beauty of the Hebrew Scriptures; mingled with this, however, there was a vein of lofty emptiness, a sort of prose upon stilts, which took strong hold of the fancy of youthful writers; nearly all of whom began to try their wings in imitations of the poetical prose of Macpherson, and thus produced a strange menagerie of Gorgons, Hydras, and Chimeras, to the special wonder and consternation of plain English readers. Perhaps the frequency of literary imposition is itself an indication of a previous decline of taste; when honest commodities are in good demand, and the supply tolerably abundant, there is little temptation to resort to knavery. The Della Cruscan school naturally came next, with Madame Piozzi and Mrs. Robinson at its head; and the Oscars and Malvinas were put to flight by the Anna Matildas and the Lauras. This ephemeral race was swept away by the blast of Gifford's satire; but not before they had prepared the way for the reception of the sentimental novels, which came in like an inundation at the beginning of the present century, and whose spells were with difficulty broken by the combined forces of Miss Edgeworth and Sir Walter Scott.

No one did more to encourage this false taste, than Dr. Darwin; and no man was ever more signally its victim. He was a person of eccentric turn of mind, but of great ability, and of acknowledged eminence in his medical profession. Some idea of his character, if the old proverb can be trusted, may be gathered from that of his intimate associates. One of these was Thomas Day, the ingenious author of *Sandford and Merton*. He was an enthusiast on the subject of education; and in order to give a practical illustration of his theory, as well as to secure a wife of quite superior order, he took two very young

girls from the foundling hospital, and undertook to educate them in entire seclusion. But nature got the better of Mr. Day; his interesting pupils were always biting and scratching each other, and in the course of a few months, as we are informed by Miss Seward, "he was heartily glad to separate the little squabblers." Next he determined to try the experiment upon one, but, after persevering for some time, gave up in despair, because he found his little phoenix so destitute of self-command, notwithstanding his excellent lessons, as to scream when he poured melted sealing-wax upon her arm, and to exhibit some symptoms of fear, when he discharged a loaded pistol at her. This remarkable experiment in education forms the basis of a portion of the story of Miss Edgeworth's novel of *Belinda*. Dr. Darwin's pursuits lay in a different line, though he seems to have been possessed by a similar spirit; the schemes of both remind us of those of Swift's philosophers, who labored to extract sunbeams from cucumbers, and gunpowder from ice.

It was at a late period of life, that Darwin resolved to become a poet; he having judiciously avoided the muses for many years, lest they should entice him from his professional pursuits. His general plan appears to have been, to exhibit the processes of nature, the results of philosophical discovery, and the nature and operations of all things in the vegetable, animal and mineral kingdoms, in poetry; — refractory subjects these, and hard to be brought under the discipline of rhyme. The Doctor was aware of this, and in order to avoid the difficulty, invested his material substances with active qualities, and resorted, like Pope, to the Rosicrusian machinery of nymphs, and gnomes, and sylphs; forgetting that Pope had only used it for the purpose of burlesque. But no one can feel much sympathy with steel, however malleable it may be, or with stone, even though it be made to move and talk; nor is it much easier to enter into the loves and feelings of the plants, a subject, which figures largely in one of Darwin's most celebrated productions. This production was ingeniously ridiculed in a poem, entitled the *Loves of the Triangles*, in which cones, and cylinders, and cubes are animated with the tender passion; and, if we may judge from the remarks of Miss Seward, it would be rather difficult to determine which of the two poems is the better satire on the other. The versification of Darwin is harmony itself; it delights the ear, even when it makes no impression on

the mind. Sometimes his extravagances are so startling, as to seem like the interpolation of some crafty satirist; as, for example, the passage in which he compares good old Dr. Franklin, the very last man who would be likely to indulge in such vagaries, to the god of love, laughing, stamping, snapping his fingers, and breaking thunderbolts upon his knee. The real difficulty with his poetry is, that it gives the reader the idea of an ingenious piece of workmanship, wrought without the slightest trace of feeling; it is beautiful, but as inanimate as the spirit of the frozen ocean. So it is with his philosophy; it exhibits much sagacity and learning, disfigured by a spirit of wild and visionary theory. He considers all animals, in the language of Falstaff, as the sons of their own works; — as originally springing from mere filaments of matter, which are improved into various degrees of perfection by the effort to obtain the means of subsistence; the advances of each generation being regularly transmitted to succeeding ones. These filaments first attain to the dignity of oysters, which acquire legs and arms by their efforts to reach the water, when they are left dry by the ebbing of the tide. They labor to rise above the rock, and the effort produces wings; they go on in the way of improvement, until by much study and hard labor, they become transformed into birds; and so on. It is represented as rather a striking instance of this march of matter, that the legs of certain aquatic birds were gradually lengthened by the habit of wading in the water, on their fishing expeditions; and a French naturalist has literally carried out this theory, by insisting that the long neck of the giraffe was acquired by its practice of browsing upon the branches of trees. Darwin was not the only believer in this odd theory; nor would we intimate, that his theories in general partake of quite so wild a character; but his judgment appears in most instances to have been subordinate to his fancy. He was much admired for a season, and was regarded with great respect by critics; but we doubt whether his works were ever read with much enthusiasm; if it were so, their day has long since past, and they now enjoy a quiet sleep, very secure from interruption, in the venerable dust of libraries. There is an incident in his personal history, which furnishes a tolerably apt illustration of his poetical system, and its fate. In order to improve upon the old fashioned mode of riding, he built a platform on his horse's back, on which he perched himself in triumph, undertaking to

guide his movements by a system of machinery, something like that of the wheel of a rudder. One day, while circumnavigating after this singular fashion, the animal made an unexpected tack, which brought the doctor to the earth with great expedition, and lamed him for life. But his fall from his poetical Pegasus was even more signal; what was believed to be sublime was at last pronounced turgid, and Dr. Darwin was forgotten.

There was the more room for the display of this perverted taste, because, during the whole period in question, comparatively little poetry appeared of a very exalted order. Great genius, manifested in commanding effort, is the only effectual purifier of declining taste; never is the atmosphere of pestilence more surely generated, than when the elements have long been sleeping. The fastidious muse of Gray belongs but partly to this period, a portion of his few poems being of an earlier date; Goldsmith wandered only for a moment in the fields of fancy; and Beattie sang but a solitary strain, "at the close of the day, when the hamlet was still." Southey has collected specimens of the poetry of the day, and it is surprising to perceive how small a portion of its authors is remembered. With a very few exceptions, to which we shall have occasion more particularly to allude, there is not one, who can be said to have exercised any considerable influence over the intellect of his time. The power of Gifford's satire has been already mentioned; he brought up a park of heavy artillery to disperse a knot of butterflies, and succeeded to admiration; but the game was hardly worth the ammunition, and the labor, as well as the remembrance of it, was soon lost. Dr. Wolcott, better known by the name of Peter Pindar, is but one of the many instances, in which contempt and oblivion follow the prostitution of superior powers. Hayley is an example of better taste, united with inferior ability; his private virtues were so bright, and his kindness of heart so rare, that one is reluctant to affirm the just sentence, which the world has passed upon the wire-drawn debility of his writings. But we have no space to continue this enumeration. An experiment, which may be worth mentioning in this connexion, was made to test the power of poetry, at the time, when the English stood in dread of an invasion of their coast from revolutionary France. Mr. Pye, who was poet laureat at this critical season, mindful of the influence of the verses of Tyrtæus over the Spartan

soldiery, translated some of them, in order to infuse a double portion of patriotic spirit into the British train-bands. Some of the commanders of the encamped militia were highly delighted with them, and caused them to be read aloud at the head of several regiments, anticipating the happiest effects from their brilliancy and patriotism. Unfortunately, before they were half finished, it was found that the greater portion of the soldiers within ear-shot, were fast asleep. In general, and as compared with other periods of English literature, there was a solemn pause among the sons of inspiration; the temple was deserted by nearly all its worshippers, while, as in old time at the Christmas revels, the boisterous masquers frisked in its venerable aisles, and made its arches echo to fantastic songs. One might for a season have supposed that the burden of the mighty city, "the beauty of the Chaldee's excellency," was to fall upon it; that the owl and satyr were to inhabit its halls, and dragons to make their abode in its pleasant pavilions.

A striking exception to the truth of these general remarks, is to be found in the case of Crabbe. Perhaps he might with more propriety be regarded as belonging to the present century; as the greater portion of his writings has been published within the last thirty years, after a very long interval, during which he was entirely silent. But his *Village* made its appearance about fifty years ago, and produced a strong impression upon discerning readers, although, owing to causes not very difficult of explanation, it did not become a general favorite with the public. His youth and a portion of his manhood were spent in his native village, a miserable spot upon the borders of the German ocean, where neither man nor nature appeared under very favorable aspects; both reflected the gloom and misery of his own condition. These circumstances affected his poetry, very much as the east winds of the season, which we by courtesy call spring, affect the invalid's debilitated frame. He seems to be animated, at times, by a spirit of revenge against man and nature; the gloom and desolation of the one, and the faults and infirmities of the other, are portrayed with the most revolting accuracy; he lays bare the heart before us, as with the knife of an anatomist. This effect is produced chiefly by his selection of his subject and his coloring; the outline is too severely true, and the heart of the reader bears witness to its truth. In his later years, when his own circumstances had become more prosperous, his views of life

were rather more cheerful; but in none of his descriptions of humble life, powerful and graphic as they certainly are, is there much of the ornamental drapery, which a cheerful spirit can throw over the lowliest condition. Men are not very apt to welcome with delight the clouds and chill of a November day. If a writer choose to enforce the gloomy views of Johnson in his *Rasselas*, it will be well for him, at least, to provide his readers with a happy valley. Crabbe held up before his a mirror, which reflected every wrinkle and defective lineament with the most unsatisfactory precision; and the consequence was, that, though his excellence was every where admitted, he was neither loved nor imitated.

While the poetical world was thus hushed in scarcely broken repose, there flashed a brilliant meteor from a quarter of the firmament, whence such a phenomenon was little looked for. Whatever might have been the glories of the ancient Scottish minstrelsy, the English ear could listen only to the music of the Lowland tongue; and we are indebted, for our knowledge of the elder Scottish poets, almost exclusively to the notices, which have been set before us by the curiosity and patriotism of modern writers. Few, we imagine, were very familiar with James of Scotland, the captive monarch-minstrel, before Mr. Irving made him the subject of one of his brilliant sketches; nor was the name of Sir David Lindsay any where as common as a household word, before Scott pronounced on the "Lord lion King at Arms," a sounding eulogy in *Marmion*. After the union, it became a favorite object with the literary men of Scotland, to identify their language and literature, as far as possible, with that of England. Now and then some sturdy patriot might be found, like the Baron of Bradwardine in *Waverley*, who "read the Epithalamium of Georgius Buchanan, and Arthur Johnstone's Psalms of a Sunday, and the *Deliciæ Poetarum*, and Sir David Lindsay's works, and Barbour's Bruce, and the Gentle Shepherd, and the Cherry and the Slae;" but the instances were probably quite rare; and even the Baron thought it a pity that these writings were not done in prose. We are indebted to the same personage for some information respecting the national poetry of his own time, which was about a century ago; when he remarks, that the only person who had excelled of late in the vain and unprofitable art of poem-making, was Allan Ramsay, the periwig-maker. The use of the Scottish idiom began to be considered as a species

of vulgarity, into which no writer of taste or genius ought to fall ; and so lasting was this prejudice, that the enterprising bookseller, to whom the manuscript of *Waverley* was offered by Sir Walter Scott, was at first afraid to print it, because it contained so much broad Scotch. This feeling reminds us of that expressed by Louis Bonaparte, when, as king of Holland, the favorite dish of pickled herring was first set before him ; he is said to have observed with considerable emphasis, that patriotism might possibly induce one to eat the creatures, but nothing else could. We may well conceive, then, with what surprise these fastidious gentlemen beheld a young Scottish farmer, striking a note of inspiration, to which saloons and palaces had long been strangers ; breathing, in this neglected and unfashionable dialect, the sweetest wood-notes wild ; casting aside all conventional restraints, and pouring the full tide of song from the depths of a chivalrous and burning heart. No wonder, that the philosophers of Edinburgh gazed upon the stranger with perplexity, if not with awe, while he rekindled the patriotic fires, which they had labored to extinguish ; no wonder, that the peasant in his cottage, the lady in her bower, the baron in his hall, welcomed with gratitude and pride the new defender of their country's fame, who stood before them in the manly dignity of genius, with the seal of inspiration on his brow.

And what a history was that of Robert Burns ! From childhood to maturity, he is condemned by hopeless want to labor, till he exhausts a constitution of unusual vigor ; his verses are composed and repeated to those around him, while he is following the plough ; but the world goes hard with him, and he resolves to seek in another land the prosperous fortune, which his own denies. In order to defray the expenses of his voyage, he publishes a collection of his poems ; and then, for the first time, bursts upon the world the knowledge of his power. He goes to Edinburgh ; there he is courted by the wise, the brilliant, and the gay ; the manly form and flashing eye of the young farmer are the attraction of the glittering saloon, while his conversation is the wonder of the philosophic circle ; but these are unprofitable honors ; and his country has no higher permanent reward for him, than the post of an exciseman. The principle, once superior to adverse fortune, melts beneath the morning sunbeams of prosperity ; his prospects are now shrouded in deeper gloom ; he retains virtue enough to lament his errors and infirmities, and too much strength of passion to

correct them ; instead of submitting to the evils incident to his condition, he exhausts his spirit in the vain attempt to war against them, as the imprisoned eagle dashes himself against the iron bars of his cage ; till at length he sinks, in the prime of manhood, into an obscure and almost unhonored grave.

Dugald Stewart expressed the opinion, that the intellect of Burns, bold, vigorous and commanding as it was, must have rendered him conspicuous, to whatever subject it might be applied. Others have believed that it was even better adapted to other departments of thought, than that to which it was devoted ; but it is on his poetry alone, that his fame will permanently rest. Much of this can be remembered only with regret, as the effusion of a reckless and ungoverned spirit, repelling by its coarseness, more than it attracts by its power. He was formed for higher purposes than to grovel in rude invective, or to amuse a bacchanalian rabble with licentious songs. His heart was naturally a fountain of generous and manly feeling, whose waters gushed out in a sparkling tide, spreading around them a bright circle of living green. The secret of his attraction is his fidelity to nature. It is by this that he touches the most delicate chords of sympathy ; and where shall we look for a finer example of this power, than in his *Cotter's Saturday Night*, so familiar, yet how beautiful ! The peasantry of Scotland loved him ; for he invested their feelings and sentiments, their joys and sorrows, with dignity and beauty ; he redeemed their language from contempt ; he made the heart of every true Scot burn within him, as he thought of the hills and valleys of his native land ; he guided the footsteps of the pilgrim to the scenes of her traditional glories ; he sung those glories in such lofty strains, that the world stood still to listen. "When the first shovel-full of earth sounded on his coffin lid," says his biographer, who was present at his funeral, I looked up, and saw tears on many cheeks, where tears were not usual." A just and touching tribute to the bard, who had led the muses to dwell by the lowly cottage fireside ; who had shewn, by testimony not soon to be forgotten, that wherever human nature is, the reare the elements of poetry. "Did you never observe," said Gray, ('when rocking winds are piping loud') "that pause, when the gust is re-collecting itself, and rising on the ear in a shrill and plaintive note, like the swell of an *Æolian harp* ? I do assure you, there is nothing in the world, so like the voice of a spirit." In his better mo-



ments, in the pauses of the storm, the melody of Burns was like the spirit's voice ; nothing could be more touching or more unaffected than his strain ; but the dark hour, the season of the conflict of his fiery passions, was his most familiar one ; then he ran through every mode of the lyre, from the deepest tones of sorrow to the grandest strain of prophecy. With him, poetry was indeed the language of passion. Nature's sternest aspects gave him most delight, because they suited best the prevailing habit of his soul. "There is scarcely any earthly object," says he, "gives me more, — I do not know that I should call it pleasure, — but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me, — than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or a high plantation, in a cloudy winter day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees, and raving over the plain. It is my best season for devotion ; my mind is rapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him who, in the language of the Hebrew bard, walks on the wings of the wind." He composed the noble address of Bruce to his army at Bannockburn, while riding in a terrific storm of wind and rain. Would that he had never been unfaithful to nature, whether bright with sunshine or dark with storm ! Would that he had never suffered the ashes to gather over his celestial fire ; had never failed to remember, that the noblest way of fame is the way of virtue !

The brief and melancholy career of Burns terminated at the age of thirty-seven ; but there is little probability that, with his fierce spirit and consuming passions, added to the misery of blighted hope, length of days would have much enhanced his renown, or that his later years would have fulfilled the rich promise of the spring. In beautiful contrast with him, stands his contemporary, Cowper, — truly a man of God, — held in reverence by all, who love to see high talent in delightful union with the amiable virtues ; by all, who can sympathize with a meek and lowly spirit, crushed by the heaviest calamity under which humanity is ever called to suffer, yet always breathing out from the depth of his affliction the accents of love to God, and good will to man. His multiplied biographies have made his personal history familiar to all readers. Year after year was his fine intellect shrouded by insanity, and when the close of life drew nigh, his condition realized the idea of the dark valley of the shadow of death. His peculiar sensitiveness, combined with the infirmities of a very delicate frame, compelled him early to retire from the agitation of the world, into deep

seclusion ; — there, like a river in the wilderness, unseen of man, but reflecting the bright blue sky of Heaven from its bosom, his days passed tranquilly away. But his solitude was not the cold and selfish seclusion of the anchorite ; it did not chill the current of his generous affections ; and his sorrows, which were many, melted without hardening his heart. No man had ever a stronger hold on the hearts of those around him ; his unobtrusive charities, his tenderness for others, made his whole life an emblem of the influences of the faith, on which his soul was anchored. Nothing can be more touching than the love with which he clung to the remembrance of the mother, whom he lost in infancy ; his allusions to her in his writings remind us of those addressed by Pope to the venerable parent, who was spared to witness the noontide glories of his fame. And the memory of Mrs. Unwin, — the excellent friend who watched him through that painful suffering, when the burden of affection ceases to be light and easy, and the love of many waxes cold, — is indissolubly bound with his. Under every aspect, and in all its relations, the character of Cowper may be studied with profit and delight.

His genius was as bold and original, as his character was pure and humble. There is not one of the poets of his country, who owed less to those who went before him ; the path in which he adventured was his own, and he trod it with a just and manly confidence in his own powers. His poetry is a faithful transcript of his own thoughts and feelings, as his descriptions are living copies of the scenery and objects around him. Sometimes he ventures into the domain of satire ; perhaps too frequently ; though his ridicule is never personal, it is not always in perfect harmony with the prevailing gravity of his theme. He makes no effort to produce effect ; the effect which he does produce arises not from highly wrought passages, but from the general strain and tenor of his writings ; indeed, he is so natural and unpretending, that the very absence of apparent effort sometimes causes the reader to lose sight of the extent and versatility of his genius. Yet his powers were vast and varied. Now he utters the grand and melancholy warnings of the Hebrew prophets ; now his inimitable humor flashes out with singular attraction ; presently, familiar scenes are brought most vividly before us in his graphic descriptions. Under all circumstances, he awakens a deep interest in the welfare of his race, and the loftiest aspirations for their intellectual and social freedom. Other poets had looked upon re-

ligion as the rock of the desert; Cowper struck that rock as with the prophet's rod, and made it flow with healing waters. He transplanted new subjects into the domain of poetry, and made them flourish with unwonted beauty. Who, before him, ever called up with such effect the images of domestic life and the recollections of the happy fireside? Who, before him, ever spread over outward nature the chastened light of religious feeling, which makes it lovely as our own autumnal landscape, under the sweet influences of the Indian summer?

We are aware, that we have given but a faint and imperfect sketch of the poetry of the latter part of the last century; one, which will perhaps only remind the reader of the remark of Johnson on the work of an English traveller; that it contained "unimportant details of his passage from one place where he saw little, to another, where he saw no more." There are several names, of some distinction too, to which we have not even alluded. Our purpose was rather to dwell upon those individuals, who exercised considerable influence, for good or evil, over writers who came after them. We can enumerate but three, who had ability enough to leave the beaten track, and to present themselves in the attitude, and with the true spirit of reformers; and these three were Crabbe, Burns and Cowper. Each of these poets, with different degrees of power and success, labored to turn back the current of false sentiment, and to set his seal, visibly and deeply, upon his age. The influence of Crabbe, for reasons already intimated, was very limited; the cloud did not attract the eye, because it rarely turned out its silver lining on the night. With the single exception of the Corn-law rhymers, we know of no succeeding poet, who can be said to have been inspired by his example. That of Burns and Cowper was more direct and obvious. As the shades were closing around the eighteenth century, several stars, of more than ordinary brilliancy, were successively appearing above the horizon. Campbell had already published his *Pleasures of Hope*, the very best of all his poems; suggested perhaps by the *Pleasures of Memory* of Rogers, which appeared not long before; and Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth, and Scott had already exhibited their rich and various powers. It was upon this brilliant circle, that the influence of Burns and Cowper was chiefly manifested. Burns laid open the new world of Scottish scenery, manners, language, and character, to other and more fortunate adventurers, and thus enabled Scott

to gather an unfading laurel harvest from the heaths and mountains of his country. It is a circumstance worth remembering, that Burns himself appears to have foreseen the future glory of the mighty minstrel. When Scott was quite a lad, he caught the notice of the poet, by naming the author of some verses, describing a soldier lying dead on the snow. Burns regarded the future minstrel with sparkling eyes, and said, 'Young man, you have begun to consider these things early.' He paused on seeing Scott's flushing face, and shook him by the hand, saying, in a deep tone, 'This boy will be heard of yet.' Nor was the effect of his lyrical success less striking; there can be little doubt that the melodies of Moore, which are worth all his other writings put together, were suggested by those, by which Burns did so much for the fame of Scottish minstrelsy. Still less can it be questioned, that the diversified and brilliant character of all the later poets we have mentioned, may in great part be traced to the force and originality of Cowper's example. Of all the poets of his time, he is certainly to be regarded with the greatest veneration; his memory will be the very last to fail. It is well that it should be so; for his aim was to raise poetry to its proper elevation, by making it the handmaid of high and holy purposes, the nurse of lofty aspirations for virtue and religious purity and of ardent sympathy with what is free and noble, the enlarger of the intellect, and the purifier of the heart. We do not deem it a vain and idle persuasion, that the day will come, when her celestial vestments and starry diadem will no more adorn the painted forms of vice and sensuality; when mankind will no longer do homage to the idols of perverted genius. Perhaps all the living generation shall not taste of death, before the eastern sky kindle with the day-spring, that shall herald the coming of an age, when poetry, instead of turning the waters into blood, like the burning mountain of the apocalypse, shall bear some faint resemblance to the descending city of the same mysterious vision, over the light of whose towers and palaces darkness shall have no dominion, and into whose gates shall enter nothing but the pure and blameless.

Mr. Allan Cunningham, the author of the biography before us, is not unknown to the lovers of our contemporary literature. His father, a respectable Scottish farmer, was steward of the proprietor of the farm of Ellisland in Nithsdale, on which Burns dwelt for a few years prior to his removal to

Dumfries, where he resided in the capacity of an exciseman, until his death; and appears to have been a man of sense and capacity. He endeavored to dissuade the poet from selecting this farm, on which his fortune was wrecked, in preference to another, less romantic in its situation, but far more fertile, which he offered him; but finding his remonstrances unavailing, remarked to him, "Mr. Burns, you have made a poet's, not a farmer's choice." The life of Burns had been previously written by men abundantly inclined to do the subject justice, but who had all, with the exception of Mr. Lockhart, done his memory much wrong. The narrative of Mr. Heron was written at the time when a subscription was raising for the benefit of the poet's family, and is mentioned by Cunningham in terms of much severity, as equally unfeeling and unjust. Currie and Walker, men of talent and liberal feeling, both of whom were warm in their admiration of Burns, appear to have been misled by the accounts of others in their view of some portions of his history; Jeffrey did perhaps still more to strengthen these erroneous impressions, by a harsh and unfeeling notice in the *Edinburgh Review*; and the honorable task of vindicating the memory of his countryman from the aspersions of foes and mistaken friends, was reserved for Mr. Lockhart, who accomplished it in a manner alike creditable to his feelings and his ability. He has shewn, by testimony not open to exception, that Burns, however he may have yielded to temptation, when allured by the attractions of society, never did so without self-reproach; that he was not habitually degraded; and that the light of manly feeling and principle within him, though it often wavered, was never extinguished. The example of Lockhart in this particular has been followed by Mr. Cunningham. His narrative derives much interest from the fact, that he writes with the feeling of one, whose early circumstances naturally bound him by strong sympathy with Burns. The other biographers had contemplated the poet from a high point of social elevation; Mr. Cunningham observes him from a different level, and writes with deeper interest and feeling. Without finding it in his power to collect many new facts, he has yet been able to prepare a very interesting narrative, and one which will be very acceptable to the many, who love to learn all that is remembered of the history of a man of extraordinary genius. The following extract will be read with deep interest. It describes Burns's death and funeral.

“ Sea-bathing relieved for a while the pains in the poet’s limbs ; but his appetite failed ; he was oppressed with melancholy ; he looked ruefully forward, and saw misery and ruin ready to swallow his helpless household up. Burns grew feverish on the 14th of July, (1796 ;) felt himself sinking, and longed to be at home. He returned on the 18th, in a small spring cart ; the ascent to his own house was steep, and the cart stopped at the foot of the Mill-hole-brae ; when he alighted, he shook much and stood with difficulty ; he seemed unable to stand upright. He stooped, as if in pain, and walked tottering towards his own door ; his looks were hollow and ghastly, and those who saw him then never expected to see him in life again.

“ It was soon spread through Dumfries that Burns had returned from the Brow much worse than when he went away ; and it was added that he was dying. The anxiety of the people, high and low, was very great. I was present and saw it. Whenever two or three were together, their talk was of Burns, and of him alone. They spoke of his history, of his person, and of his works, of his witty sayings and his sarcastic replies, and of his too early fate, with much enthusiasm, and sometimes with deep feeling. All that he had done, and all that they had hoped he would accomplish, were talked of ; half a dozen of them stopped Dr. Maxwell in the street, and said, ‘ How is Burns, Sir ? ’ He shook his head, saying, ‘ he cannot be worse,’ and passed on to be subjected to similar inquiries farther up the way. I heard one of a group inquire with much simplicity, ‘ Who do you think will be our poet now ? ’

“ Though Burns now knew he was dying, his good humor was unruffled, and his wit never forsook him. When he looked up and saw Dr. Maxwell at his bed-side,—‘ Alas,’ he said, ‘ What has brought you here ? I am but a poor crow, and not worth plucking.’ He pointed to his pistols, took them in his hand, and gave them to Maxwell, saying they could not be in worthier keeping, and he should never more have need of them. This relieved his proud heart from a sense of obligation. Soon afterwards he saw Gibson, one of his brother volunteers, by the bed-side, with tears in his eyes. He smiled and said, ‘ John, don’t let the awkward squad fire over me.’

“ His little household presented a melancholy spectacle ; the poet dying ; his wife in hourly expectation of being confined ; four helpless children wandering from room to room, gazing on their miserable parents, and little of food or cordial kind to pacify the whole or soothe the sick. To Jessie Lewars, all who are charmed with the poet’s works are much indebted ; she acted with the prudence of a sister and the tenderness of a daughter,

and kept desolation away, though she could not keep disease. ‘A tremor,’ says Maxwell, ‘pervaded his frame; his tongue, though often refreshed, became parched; and his mind, when not roused by conversation, sunk into delirium. On the second and third day after his return from the Brow, the fever increased, and his strength diminished. On the fourth day, when his attendant held a cordial to his lips, he swallowed it eagerly, rose almost wholly up, spread out his hands, sprang forward nigh the whole length of the bed, fell on his face and expired. He was thirty-seven years and seven months old, and of a form and strength which promised long life; but the great and inspired are often cut down in youth, while

“Villains ripen gray with time.”

“His interment took place on the twenty-fifth of July; nor should it be forgotten, in relating the poet’s melancholy story, that, while his body was borne along the street, his widow was taken in labor and delivered of a son, who survived his birth but a short while. The leading men of the town and neighborhood appeared as mourners; the streets were lined by the Angus-shire Fencibles and the Cinque Ports Cavalry, and his body was borne by the volunteers to the old Kirk-yard, with military honors. The multitude who followed amounted to many thousands. It was an impressive and a mournful sight; all was orderly and decorous. The measured steps, the military array, the colors displayed, and the muffled drum, I thought then, and think now, had no connexion with a pastoral bard. I mingled with the mourners. On reaching the grave into which the poet’s body was about to descend, there was a pause among them, as if loth to part with his remains; and when the first shovel-full of earth sounded on the coffin-lid, I looked up, and saw tears on many cheeks where tears were not usual. The volunteers justified the surmise of Burns by three ragged and straggling volleys; the earth was heaped up, and the vast multitude melted silently away.”

In connexion with the biography, Mr. Cunningham has favored the public with a new edition of the works of Burns, doubtless the most complete and valuable that has yet appeared. He has endeavored to arrange the several productions, as far as might be, in the order in which they were composed, and has illustrated them with a variety of copious annotations, containing much curious and entertaining information. He has procured a large number of poetical pieces, which were not included in the edition of Currie, together with many letters, not previously published. In filling up the blanks which had been

left by other editors with the names of persons and places originally intended, he has received much aid from the early friends and correspondents of Burns. Whether he may not have been more free in his revelations than was consistent with the regard due to individuals or to surviving friends, we cannot undertake to determine ; but we are inclined to fear that in some instances the public curiosity will be gratified at the expense of private feeling. There can be no doubt, however, that he is eminently qualified for the execution of his task by his familiarity with the domestic habits and manners, and the other peculiarities of the peasantry of Scotland, as well as by his early acquaintance with the scenes, where a portion of the life of Burns was spent, after he had become the object of general curiosity and admiration. By all, who desire to be most intimately acquainted with the character and writings of the poet, the result of his labors will probably be regarded as superseding the necessity of any future investigation.

In order to enable us to form an entirely accurate judgment of the character and powers of a man of genius, it may perhaps be desirable that we should be in possession of those minute particulars, which indicate the general current, as well as the changes of his thoughts and feelings, and which bring the individual before us, as he appeared to those who knew him in the daily intercourse of life ; but it cannot be denied, that the person who is thus revealed to the world, is unfortunate beyond the ordinary lot ; that he is exposed to a trial, from which few could escape unharmed. Many are happy enough to present to the public their own portraits of their own character, and to obliterate, or at least to soften the harsher features of extravagance and folly. Far different has been the fate of Burns. Every burst of passion, every violent and sometimes intolerably coarse outbreak of satire, every infidel exclamation, every howl of debauchery, every thing, in short, which fell from the lips or pen of one so conspicuous, and the very extravagance or rudeness of which caused it to be remembered, has been faithfully treasured up, and we see him as he was ; — his character stripped of the veil, with which tenderness is apt to cover frailty. He appears to have anticipated that such would be his fate, and sometimes alludes to it with feeling. Those who are interested in his history may yet derive from it the monitory lesson, so beautifully conveyed by Wordsworth in his address to the sons of Burns, on visiting the grave of their father.



“ Let no mean hope your souls enslave ;  
Be independent, generous, brave ;  
Your father such example gave,  
And such revere :  
But be admonished by his grave,  
And think and fear !”

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ART. III. — *Survey of the Coast.*

1. *Papers on various Subjects connected with the Survey of the Coast of the United States.* By F. R. HASSLER. Communicated 3d March, 1820. *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society.* Vol. 2. New Series. Philadelphia. 1825.
2. *Principal Documents relating to the Survey of the Coast of the United States since 1816.* Published by F. R. HASSLER, Superintendent of the Survey. New-York. 1834.

It may naturally excite some surprise, that in an age peculiarly characterized by an adventurous philosophy, when scarcely any plausible scheme fails for lack of patronage, so little attention should be given to an undertaking of so great public concern, and so far as its execution has proceeded, so honorable to the nation, as the Survey of the Coast. It is, indeed, perhaps not so much as generally known, that such a survey was originated nearly thirty years since ; that it has, with different degrees of success, always under the patronage of the government, and, with the exception of about fourteen years, always under the same superintendent, subsisted to the present day ; and that its results, so far as they have transpired, have elicited commendation in every country but our own.

That it has been so, may be partly owing to a cause which we would do our part towards removing. The notice of a national work of this kind in the annual communication from the chief of a department, passes as a thing of course. A critique on the management of its details, in a periodical, which is exclusively scientific, is read only by the initiated ; while the mass and influential part of the community may remain ignorant of a work, than which few have stronger claims to their